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FM AMEMBASSY TASHKENT

TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 0806

INFO ALL SOUTH AND CENTRAL ASIA COLLECTIVE

CIS COLLECTIVE

NATO EU COLLECTIVE

RHEFDIA/DIA WASHINGTON DC

RHEHAAA/NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL WASHINGTON DC

RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 0008

RUEAIIA/CIA WASHINGTON DC

RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA 0188

RUEHNT/AMEMBASSY TASHKENT

RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHINGTON DC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 04 TASHKENT 000581

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR SCA, DRL, AND PRM

AMEMBASSY ASTANA PASS TO USOFFICE ALMATY

AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI PASS TO AMCONSUL HYDERABAD

AMEMBASSY HELSINKI PASS TO AMCONSUL ST PETERSBURG

AMEMBASSY MOSCOW PASS TO AMCONSUL VLADIVOSTOK

AMEMBASSY MOSCOW PASS TO AMCONSUL YEKATERINBURG

AMEMBASSY BELGRADE PASS TO AMEMBASSY PODGORICA

AMEMBASSY ATHENS PASS TO AMCONSUL THESSALONIKI

E.O. 12958: DECL: 2019/04/27

TAGS: PHUM PGOV PREF PREL SOCI UZ

SUBJECT: UZBEKISTAN: ACTIVIST REPORTS ATTACKS ON HERSELF AND ADOPTED CHILD

CLASSIFIED BY: Richard Fitzmaurice, P/E Officer, Department of State;  
REASON: 1.4(B), (D)

¶1. (C) Summary: On April 23, poloff met with Human Rights Alliance activist Elena Urlaeva, who reported being attacked by two unknown assailants on April 15 after receiving threatening phone calls for weeks demanding that she leave Uzbekistan. She also reported that her adopted 5-year old son was attacked on April 22 by an unknown older child. Urlaeva appeared to be uninjured and said that her son was recovering. It is possible that, as speculated by Urlaeva and Human Rights Watch (HRW), the attack on April 15 was retaliation for her activism. Still, Urlaeva's description of event does not entirely make sense. Urlaeva is highly emotional and has reported similar attacks on a more regular basis than other activist in Uzbekistan. End summary.

ACTIVIST REPORTABLY ATTACKED BY TWO UNKNOWN ASSAILANTS

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¶2. (C) On April 22, poloff met with Human Rights Alliance activist Elena Urlaeva, who reported being attacked outside her Tashkent apartment by two unknown assailants on the morning of April 15. On the day of the attack, she said that her husband Mansur left their apartment at 8 am and observed two unknown young men dressed in black and wearing sunglasses (despite a steady downpour of rain outside) standing in their apartment building's ground floor stairwell. Mansur reportedly used his cell phone to call Urlaeva and warn her about the two men.

¶3. (C) Urlaeva left the apartment with her five-year old adopted son at 9 am, and was then reportedly attacked by the two men as she was leaving the apartment building. One of the men grabbed her from behind, and then the two men hit her on the head and back. One of the men allegedly wielded a knife and cut her jacket. According to her, the attack lasted for approximately seven minutes and left her with bruises on her head and back (Note: Poloff saw no

evidence of bruising on Urlaeva's head. Urlaeva appeared to be in no worse health than when he saw her last in December 2008. End note.) While attacking her, the men screamed and asked her why she did not leave Uzbekistan. She screamed during the attack, but none of her neighbors came out to help her. She described one of the attackers as ethnically Uzbek and the other as ethnically Russian. The two were approximately 25 to 30 years old, short but well-built, and used "jargon" which suggested to her that they might have been drug-users or "hooligans." She reported that a car that she believed belonged to the National Security Service (NSS) was outside her apartment during the attack. The incident was later reported by the independent Uznews.net website and in an April 17 Human Rights Watch (HRW) press release.

¶4. (C) After the attack, Urlaeva said she immediately went to the local police station to complain about the incident. The police officers wrote down her description of events and said they would investigate and try to find the two men. Urlaeva said that she had so far heard nothing more from the police.

#### ACTIVIST REPORTS SURVEILLANCE, HARRASSING CALLS BEFORE ATTACK

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¶5. (C) Urlaeva said the attack was preceded by anonymous phone calls that she received at her home starting around the end of

TASHKENT 00000581 002 OF 004

March. She reported receiving the calls about once a day, involving an unknown male voice asking her why she had not yet left Uzbekistan and warning her that she could be attacked by "drug-users or hooligans." Three days before the attack, Urlaeva was reportedly closely followed by two cars. Urlaeva said the threatening phone calls have continued since the attack. She also said that a man named Ali Saidaliyev, who was reportedly detained after Urlaeva gave him 40 copies of an anti-Karimov pamphlet and later blamed her for his arrest (see para 9), was hanging around outside her apartment and threatening her.

#### ADOPTED SON OF ACTIVIST REPORTABLY ATTACKED ON APRIL 23

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¶6. (C) Urlaeva also reported that on April 22, her 5-year old adopted son was attacked with a stick by an older child. She said that her son left their apartment at 6:30 pm and returned a short while later with a large, bleeding welt on his forehead. Her son reported that he was hit on the head with a stick by an unknown older child. After the incident, Urlaeva brought her son to a local hospital, but upset with the lack of medical care available, returned home with her son. She said that her son was recuperating in bed and expected him to recover in a few days.

¶7. (C) Urlaeva allowed the possibility that the attack on her son was unrelated to her own activities, but speculated that there could be some connection due to the fact that it occurred shortly after the April 15 attack. She explained that the child was that of her husband's sister, who was unable to raise the child herself because of "mental illness."

#### ACTIVIST SPECULATES ON POSSIBLE MOTIVES

¶ 18. (C) Urlaeva noted that on the day she was attacked, she was planning to attend a hearing in a civil court case launched by Natalya Mamadjanova, who is suing several police officers from the Chilanzar and Mirzo-Ulugbek police stations for allegedly forcing her to sign over her apartment in downtown Tashkent to them two years ago. Urlaeva said that she was approached for assistance by Mamadjanova, who allegedly works in the Presidential Apparatus (Comment: How someone who reportedly worked in the Presidential Apparatus, the most-powerful government body in Uzbekistan, could be swindled out of her apartment by a bunch low-ranking district cops, and why that person would then approach a human rights activist like Urlaeva, who is best known for her difficulties with authorities, for assistance is entirely unclear. End comment.) Urlaeva speculated that the attack on her on April 15 might have been an attempt to prevent her from attending the latest hearing of the trial.

¶ 19. (C) Urlaeva also speculated that the attacks could have been motivated by her frequent organization of anti-government pickets in Tashkent and her production and distribution of anti-Karimov pamphlets. She reported that the Human Rights Alliance was forced to leave its office last year after one of its members, Yusup Imamov, began to harass and threaten other members. Afterwards, Urlaeva reported moving a Xerox copier machine that the Alliance

TASHKENT 00000581 003 OF 004

purchased with U.S. Embassy Democracy Commission funds in 2007 to her own apartment, which she is now using to produce anti-Karimov pamphlets accusing the President of "crimes against humanity, genocide, and ordering the killing of innocent protesters at Andijon in 2005" (Note: The Human Rights Alliance received a Democracy Commission grant in 2007 to support their general human rights reporting, not to produce such pamphlets. End note.) Urlaeva explained that she distributes the pamphlets to other Alliance members and the general public.

#### BACKGROUND ON HUMAN RIGHTS ALLIANCE

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¶ 10. (C) Urlaeva is the most prominent activist of the Human Rights Alliance, a motley group of aging activists and relatives of prisoners, which, until recently, received almost all of its financial support from Free Farmer opposition Party Leader Nigara Khidoyatova and the Sunshine Coalition, which is now led by Gulam Umarov, the son of imprisoned Coalition founder Sanjar Umarov (septel). While the Alliance has done some human rights reporting, including monitoring the 2007 presidential election and the use of child labor during the cotton harvest, the organization mostly organizes small-scale protests (never numbering more than 10 or 15 participants, mostly Alliance members) in Tashkent on behalf of political prisoners, including Sanjar Umarov, and then reporting on the crackdown on its members which inevitably follows such protests. In poloff's experience, the Alliance is the most disorganized and least professional human rights groups operating in Tashkent.

#### OTHER ALLIANCE ACTIVISTS RECENTLY REFUSED, GRANTED ASYLUM

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¶ 11. (C) In 2008, two other Human Rights Alliance members, Akhtam

Shaymardanov and Abdillo Tojiboy ugli, left Uzbekistan and applied for political asylum with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) offices outside of Uzbekistan, claiming that they were persecuted after attempting to run as candidates in the 2007 December presidential election in Uzbekistan. At the time, poloff saw no evidence that either had been threatened for his activism. Tojiboy ugli was denied political asylum by UNHCR and has since returned to Uzbekistan and continued his activism. Poloff has not heard anything recently from Shaymardanov, but Urlaeva on April 24 reported that Shaymardanov had been granted political asylum and was recently resettled to the United States.

URLAEVA STILL VISITED BY MENTAL HEALTH PRACTITIONERS

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¶12. (C) Urlaeva reported that she is still visited at home once a month by mental health practitioners, who have the power to recommend that she be forcibly remanded to a mental health institution. According to HRW, Urlaeva was subject to forced psychiatric treatment in 2001, 2002, and 2005, where she was given powerful antipsychotic drugs. In 2005, a court ordered that she be listed in the local police registry as mentally ill and required that she meet once a month with a doctor at a local psychiatric

TASHKENT 00000581 004 OF 004

clinic.

COMMENT

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¶13. (C) It is possible that, as Urlaeva and HRW speculate, the two attacks reported by Urlaeva were in retaliation for her human rights activism. Still, Urlaeva's description of events does not entirely add up. Despite claiming that she was attacked and punched by the men for seven minutes, poloff saw no evidence that Urlaeva was injured. It is also unclear why her husband would be concerned enough to phone Urlaeva to warn her about the two men outside their apartment, but then not offer to walk her outside of the building, despite the fact that they were allegedly receiving threatening phone calls on a daily basis that she could be attacked by "drug-users or hooligans."

¶14. (C) While Uzbek authorities have used the Soviet-era practice of forcing activists into psychiatric detention, we also have reasons to believe that Urlaeva's mental health issues are not entirely imaginary. One of poloff's predecessors related an incident that occurred shortly after the mailing of the "anthrax letters" in the United States in 2001, when Urlaeva reportedly walked into the Uzbek Parliament carrying a bag of white powder. Several times over the past year, she has reported being attacked by "drunk gypsies" while leading pickets in Tashkent. Last fall, she said that her husband attacked her as part of a government provocation. In February 2008, she reported being attacked at the Tashkent train station on her way to monitor a trial of religious extremists in Bukhara. In 2007, she reported being attacked on several other occasions. In total, Urlaeva has reported been attacked far more times than any other activist in Uzbekistan in recent years. While we are not dismissing the possibility that the recent attacks occurred and were some sort of provocation, we also note that Urlaeva is highly emotional and might be exaggerating some incidents.

¶15. (C) In addition, Urlaeva's claim that unknown individuals are demanding that she leave Uzbekistan does not generally track with what we have observed to be the government's general reluctance to allow activists to leave the country. On the contrary, Uzbek authorities have gone to great lengths to prevent human rights activists from leaving Uzbekistan, including routinely denying them exit visas. On several occasions, Uzbek authorities have issued Interpol arrest warrants for Uzbek human rights and opposition activists abroad and have tried to have them forcibly extradited back to Uzbekistan on various charges. We believe that such efforts are aimed at attempting to limit the ability of government opponents to criticize the regime from abroad.

NORLAND